

INTRODUCTION



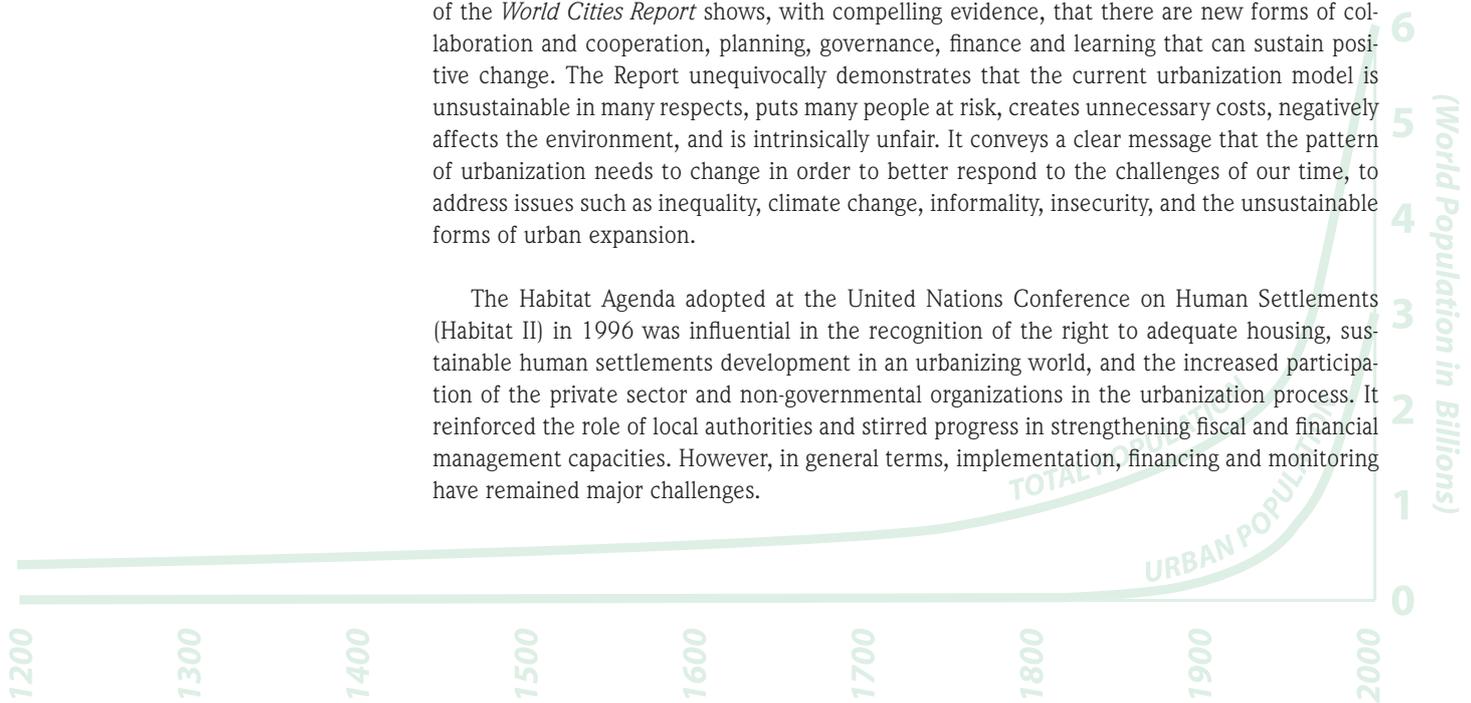
The world has changed remarkably since the Habitat II Conference took place in Istanbul in 1996. Twenty years appears to be a short span of time, but our ideas, practices, modes of production and consumption, demographic structures, as well as education and health conditions have drastically changed. The way cities are shaped, their form and functionality have also been transformed over these years. Many of these changes have been for the better, but others for the worst.

The growth of the world's cities, from the north to the south, and from the east to the west, is ingrained in a culture of short-term economic benefit and often unbridled consumption and production practices that compromise the sustainability of the environment. The causes may vary according to different contexts, but uncontrolled growth, privatization of public goods, lack of regulations and institutions as well as forms of collective indolence are often the key factors behind a model of urbanization that is becoming highly unsustainable. Urbanization is at the same time a positive force underpinning profound social, political and economic transformation.

Urbanization and growth go hand in hand, and no one can deny that urbanization is essential for socio-economic transformation, wealth generation, prosperity and development. As this Report asserts, the emerging future of cities largely depends on the way we plan and manage urbanization, and the way we leverage this transformative process to 'provide the setting, the underlying base and also the momentum for global change'.¹

The analysis of urban development of the past twenty years presented in this first edition of the *World Cities Report* shows, with compelling evidence, that there are new forms of collaboration and cooperation, planning, governance, finance and learning that can sustain positive change. The Report unequivocally demonstrates that the current urbanization model is unsustainable in many respects, puts many people at risk, creates unnecessary costs, negatively affects the environment, and is intrinsically unfair. It conveys a clear message that the pattern of urbanization needs to change in order to better respond to the challenges of our time, to address issues such as inequality, climate change, informality, insecurity, and the unsustainable forms of urban expansion.

The Habitat Agenda adopted at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in 1996 was influential in the recognition of the right to adequate housing, sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world, and the increased participation of the private sector and non-governmental organizations in the urbanization process. It reinforced the role of local authorities and stirred progress in strengthening fiscal and financial management capacities. However, in general terms, implementation, financing and monitoring have remained major challenges.



¹ United Nations (2013) Sustainable Urbanization, thematic think piece prepared for the 2030 development agenda, New York.

The New Urban Agenda that is expected to be adopted at the Habitat III Conference cannot afford to ignore these shortcomings. It should convey a sense of urgency in the implementation of policies and actions that can no longer depend on political schedules or opportunistic moments, but should, instead, be set in clear, well-defined agendas. The New Urban Agenda should adopt a city-wide approach to development with concrete actions, setting out clear funding mechanisms and effective means of implementation and monitoring.

Habitat III and the New Urban Agenda should establish critical connections to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other international agreements. The Report is very explicit on the need to ensure a strong convergence among these agendas as a way of complementing and improving the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those with an urban component.

The research, data, knowledge, practice and experience of UN-Habitat has facilitated the production of this highly informative Report. Its different chapters collectively present a path to sustainable urban development that the New Urban Agenda must consider.

A set of principles that guide major shifts in strategic and policy thinking are presented to ensure that human rights, the rule of law, equitable development and democratic participation are the bastions of this Agenda. The Report also elaborates on the strategic components that work as a framework for action based on UN-Habitat's three-pronged approach to planned urbanization – an effective and enabling legal and institutional environment, improved urban planning and design and vibrant local economic development.

Finally, the Report expounds the most important levers for the transformative change of cities. These include planned city extensions, planned city infills, land readjustment programmes, basic services and housing plans and public space planning and regulations. The need to put in place a new global monitoring framework to assess how countries and cities implement this Agenda and the urban components of the SDGs is also highlighted in this Report.

The success of the New Urban Agenda is about values, commitments and collective efforts. It is for the Habitat III Conference to steer the 'emerging futures' of our cities on to a sustainable and prosperous path.



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